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How to Interest Children in Missions

SOME SUGGESTIONS
FOR MISSION
BAND LEADERS

By
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Crowell 1854-1926

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HOW TO INTEREST CHILDREN IN MISSIONS

Some Suggestions for Mission Band Leaders

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AS ONE scans the long list of missionaries who as boys and girls gave themselves to the cause of missions and are now doing splendid work on the field, one wonders whether the mission bands and junior societies of today, with their increase of knowledge and improved methods, will show results at all in proportion.

Probably they will in the number who will become missionaries at home or in foreign lands. Certainly they will in the army of warm supporters of the work. By making real to the minds of boys and girls the countries erstwhile known as "heathen," and the joys and sorrows of the people who live in them, the mission band leader awakens a sympa-

thetic interest, which, ever deepening through the years, shall help to hold to its proper place the study and love of Christian missions.

Many are the ways by which the boys and girls of these faraway lands are made to live before the eyes of the boys and girls at home—by maps, pictures, curios and stories; by travel clubs and question matches; by games sometimes, for the wise leader knows that the deepest earnestness may go hand in hand with the most bubbling merriment; she even plans for a little fun now and then, for the brighter the meeting the longer will it be held in memory.

Every one who has anything to do with children knows that the best way to interest them in any subject is to give them something to do for it. This never dismays a good leader; it is, on the contrary, her delight to give them things to do—or would be—but, alas! for her, her children are in school, and "doing" to such an extent that they, their mothers and their teachers are already bordering upon a state of nervous collapse. When the leader asks for the hour of the meeting—once or twice a month—with a little extra time for the "doing," she hears in reply: "His lessons," "her French," "he must spend that particular hour in the fresh air," "her music," "her dancing-class, you know." The leader does know. She also knows the deep and lasting benefit to be had from *her* mission-band hour,

so she perseveres and in time—though she sometimes fears that it may not be until eternity—has her reward.

SOME ATTRACTIVE PLANS

The missionary career begins with the Cradle Roll Tens and the Baby Bands, made up of the tiniest tots—too tiny oftentimes to know of their membership. They pay their "dues," however, being guided by father's or mother's hand to the wee mite-chests. Of course in these early days the band is a means of grace, principally, to the father and mother, but the little people gradually take in the lessons of unselfishness and interest in others, and when they have reached maturity they cannot remember the day when they did not belong to a mission band.

From the Cradle Roll they move on to the Missionary Kindergarten and to the Junior Society, or Mission Band, or Brigade, or Club. Somewhere along in these latter days occurs the metamorphosis from "Children" to "Young People." The day and hour of its arrival cannot be foretold with exactness, but it is sure to come, and when it comes the leader is well aware of it.

Generally speaking, the next move into the Senior Society is a wise one, although in some cases much is lost by it, for under the right kind of a leader more may be gained in mis-

sionary experience as the oldest members of a mission band than under a poorer leader as the youngest members of a Senior Society.

The mission band leader generally has under her training boys or girls from nine to fifteen years of age. For them a year's study of some one country gives, perhaps, the best results. "A year's study," however, may mean fifty-two sessions or eight, according to whether every Sunday afternoon is at their disposal, or the missionary season comprises one meeting a month, from October to May. The fewer the meetings the more careful must be the planning.

Suppose that a band has a membership of forty, and is limited to eight meetings. Then there may be five standing committees, with a different chairman for each of the eight meetings. These committees include:

1. Music (five members).
2. Bible readings (three members).
3. Decoration and Souvenirs (five members)
4. Refreshments (five members).
5. Program, including committees on Papers, Maps, Pictures, Curios and Mottoes (three members in each—fifteen).

These committees include thirty-three members, leaving seven for an Emergency Committee, who may be called on for any extra service or may constitute an absentee squad,

for measles and music lessons co-exist with the missionary season.

Suppose that Alaska is the subject to be studied.

Committee No. 1 will practice hymns for the devotional exercises, also appropriate solos, and hymns and songs which are favorites in Alaska.

Committee No. 2 will get from every member Bible verses with which they have been familiar as long as they can remember. From them the committee will, perhaps, make an acrostic upon some foundation truth of the Bible. (This concrete example of texts—known to them from babyhood, which thousands of Alaskan boys and girls have never heard—is better than the vague statement that the Bible is unknown.)

Committee No. 3 will decorate the room in a way to emphasize the subject of the meeting and provide for souvenirs little flags, canoes, snowshoes, or something else which will be a reminder of Alaska.

Committee No. 4 will furnish refreshments for the social half-hour which follows the meeting.

Committee No 5 will arrange programs, which should include at various times a map-talk, papers, discussions, recitations, tableaux, to be carried out by members of the committee or of the Emergency Committee. A "picture

gallery" may be arranged, a "loan collection" of curios secured, and appropriate mottoes prepared. For this purpose gummed letters can be bought, thus saving the precious time.

Before and behind, around and underneath every committee stands the band leader, ready to suggest, aid and encourage, always remembering the value to each member of thus "taking part" but never forgetting that the meeting, *as a meeting*, is to be kept up to high-water mark: the standard being borne ahead, while the ranks come up to the standard.

"*Rather hard on the leader?*" Well, yes, perhaps so, if she look at it in that way. But she doesn't. She thinks, rather, of the resultant enthusiasm of the band, for every member is "doing," and doing her best every time. Do not misunderstand and do not forget that the boys and girls are in school. The leader does not forget it. She remembers it even in her sleep—the reiterations of the mothers during her waking hours insure that; but here is where her careful thinking and planning tells. Not one of the forty members has more to do than she can do *easily*—if only her interest is at white heat.

When the year is over the band *will* know something about the country studied; they will know that the boys and girls there are boys and girls of like passions with themselves, and very much like them, save that they are

not so happy. And if Committee No. 2 has done its work well it will be seen why they are less happy and the band will feel, as they never have before, that having themselves freely received, it is their great gladness to freely give, for nowadays the leader says with her band: "We JOYFULLY receive the Word of Christ, bidding His people go into all the world and make disciples of all the nations."

ANOTHER WAY

That is one way. But sometimes the leader strives not for detailed knowledge of one country, but a comprehensive look at many. For this, perhaps, nothing is quite so good as a Travel Club. There are many ways to conduct it. For the younger children it is made realistic by means of excursion tickets, parlor cars with porter and conductor, ocean steamers (made of chairs), etc. The older boys and girls naturally think these devices suitable only for "kids," but greatly enjoy a personally conducted tour upon more self-respecting lines; as, for instance, when half the membership, with the leader as a guide, "travels" in Alaska, keeping notebooks, bringing home curios and arranging the room for the meeting to represent a time of special interest—as a "Tourist Day in Sitka," giving every possible typical sight. At this meeting they tell their experi-

ences, being all the while exposed to a merciless "quiz," which they had expected, for while they "traveled" the other half "stayed at home," quietly reading up for the quiz.

BIOGRAPHY

The leader wants her band to know something of the devotion and heroism of missionaries, and in a "biographical year" they learn this, and more, for somehow in studying these inspiring lives, which are like a tonic to their own characters, they come to have a deep compassion for those to whom the missionary's life was given. There is endless variety in the methods of this biographical study, and there is no surer way "to interest boys and girls in missions"; only, to be successful, the leader herself must be on fire. The study then becomes of absorbing interest, and is, perhaps, of all others, the most likely to lead to the consecration of lives to the mission field.

OUR MAGAZINES

The leader of today is happy in having as coadjutors in her work bright and attractive missionary periodicals, and she counts it among her privileges that she may help to foster in her boys and girls a love for the children's paper, which will make natural and

necessary the reading of the "grown-ups" when the time comes. Therefore, for one year she transmutes her program committee into an editorial staff. "Leading articles," "associated press dispatches," "personals," "anecdotes," "poetry," "book notices," "reviews," are all to be "edited"; also, critics and judges are to be appointed. The source of supply is their own magazine, but it is understood that other missionary periodicals of their church may also be tapped. One item from the daily press having a missionary connection is asked for from each member.

At the meeting the various members of the staff tell or read what has been collected from the magazine for their departments. The critics pronounce upon the completeness, or otherwise, of their articles. The judges assign an award of "honorary mention" to the best "current events" item, and also to the best solution of puzzles when the magazine contains them.

FASCINATING MISSIONARY BOOKS

One thing is essential. Her boys and girls *must* come to a realization of the fact that of all reading the reading of missionary books is the most fascinating.

But how shall they realize it? By reading the books, of course! But delight in this

reading being an acquired taste (boys and girls seem not to have been born with it), how shall she help them to acquire it? Many people like to solve puzzles, and to some it adds zest to receive a prize for correct solutions.

So the leader makes some puzzles, and on a day finds gathered about the long-drawn-out extension table in the church parlor sixteen girls from her band, none being over fourteen years of age. On the table are missionary books *galore*, and the puzzles, answers to which will be found in the aforesaid books.

Time: 2.30 P.M. Prize: A new book for the band library. The books are vigorously attacked. There is a common "pool" for ideas, and the glimmer of an answer which one girl finds may light up the question for another. Sometimes, as the searching of books goes on, the whole story suddenly stands revealed as in a flashlight. Excitement waxes. The leader stands by longing to help, but nobly resisting the temptation, for the prize has been offered upon the terms, "No help." She has seen that necessary books and none that are unnecessary, are taken from the library. That is all —no! she *does* tell them when they are "hot," and, perhaps, when they are *very* "cold." Now and then, by a suggestive question or two she sharpens their wits, and she encourages them all the time, but she *tell*s them—not a thing.

So it goes on; pages are eagerly turned, delightful discoveries are made now and again, until, when the time comes for closing, every puzzle has been conquered, every question answered—*save one*. "Who called slavery the heart-disease of Africa? Who? *Who?* WHO? But shall the ship go down in full sight of the harbor? Never! So some valorous ones remain. The answer is found in "Tropical Africa," and the prize is won.

One afternoon of pleasurable puzzle guessing or conundrum solving does not immediately produce sixteen fully fledged lovers of missionary literature. Nor does one swallow make a summer. But when one sees an unmistakable swallow, one does not doubt that summer is on its way; and the leader does not doubt, either.

Time and space forbid mention of the varied uses of map and picture and question; for band leaders are born, not made, and the born leader does not tire, nor does fertility of invention forsake her.

GIVING OR "RAISING"

The leader also trains her boys and girls in giving money for the work of missions. There are still some bands who "raise money for missions" by ways good, less good, and bad. But fairs, suppers and "entertainments" seem to be dying out. Let none drop a tear for their

passing! Happy is that church that knows them not, and there are churches where one would almost look for the walls to fall if the "money-changers" gained an entrance.

The best leaders today encourage their bands in earning, saving or paying regularly and proportionately, from an allowance, for missions, believing that better is the (possible) little that a systematic band gives than *many* dollars and fairs therewith.

In the donation of money the leader uses as stepping-stones to the larger giving of the future, "special objects," of a kind which appeal to the warm sympathies of children—kindergartens, children's hospitals (*e.g.*, Endeavor Hall at San Juan, Porto Rico), orphanages, are some of these. She thinks of them as stepping stones only, and aims so to bring before her boys and girls the whole grand missionary enterprise, *as a whole*, that the very grandeur of it shall inspire them to give of their money to the point of sacrifice, for anything less would be unworthy. To accomplish this she helps them to love "missions" with all their hearts. Later they will see that in the golden cord that binds the whole round earth about the throne of God there are three strands, which we call "local," "home," and "foreign" missions, and that this means that to some of them will come the call of Christ to work for Him at home, helping by their money to speed the coming of

the Kingdom; some will hear Him calling to service in hard places of their own country; while to others "far, far away, like bells at evening pealing, the voice of Jesus sounds o'er land and sea."

For this the leader waits, not doubting that thus shall be given her the desire of her heart.

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